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## Meeting Notes

Attendees: Jeff Brillhart - NHDOT  
Bill O'Donnell - FHWA  
Harry Kinter - FHWA  
Rich Roach - Army Corp.  
Lori Sommer - Wtlands. Brd  
Russ St. Pierre - NHDOT  
Charlie Hood - NHDOT  
Bill Hauser - NHDOT  
Mark Kern - EPA  
Marc Laurin - NHDOT  
Bill Neidermeyer - USFWS  
Tony Grande - VHB  
Senan Murdock - VHB  
Others.....

Date/Time: May 17, 2000 11:00 am

Project No.: Salem Manchester 10418-C, I-93 Widening  
50885

Place: NHDOT Design Conf. Room

Re: Resource Agency Meeting/ Exits 1 & 2 W/  
Rail

Notes taken by: Senan Murdock, VHB

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The purpose of the meeting was to review the conceptual design alternatives for the I-93 highway corridor that have been developed from the NH/MA Stateline through Exit 2 with the Resource Agencies.

Jeff Brillhart opened the meeting with a brief overview of the project. He mentioned that we last met with the Resource Agencies on February 16, 2000 with design concepts that did not include rail. He said that we were here today to present some tissue concepts through Exit 2 that did include a rail alternative. Jeff stated that it was the Department's intent to provide space for a future rail so that when transportation needs warrant and funds are available, it could be a viable option.

Tony Grande explained the plans: the 400 scale color base plan with wetlands covering the entire length of the corridor, and the 200 scale working design plans showing the intended improvements through Exit 2. Tony mentioned that 100 scale working plans were previously presented showing alignment options and interchange designs along this section of I-93, but they did not include a rail option. Tony explained that the typical section being used through this area is 4 lanes in each direction with one lane being designated as a High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane. The HOV Lane adds 6 feet additional width to each barrel; 4 feet for a painted buffer between lanes, and an additional 2 feet on the inside shoulder. He also explained that the rail corridor width, depending upon constraints, would vary from 50' (if the rail is on structure) , to 62' (if a closed drainage system is required), to 88' (if width is available for an open drainage

system). Tony also mentioned that there was a study commencing in Massachusetts to consider improving I-93 through Andover and Methuen.

Tony explained the three options that the Department is considering. South of Exit 1 all three options are similar with the rail hugging the west side of the southbound (SB) barrel in an effort to avoid a lengthy segment of Policy Brook and a large residential area. A brief summary follows:

**Option 1**

Under this option between Exits 1 and Exit 2, the railroad would be located where the I-93 NB barrel currently exists. The northbound (NB) barrel is shifted to the east causing impacts to prime wetlands, with additional impacts through the Exit 1 interchange on the east side. The rail remains in the median, utilizing a closed drainage system to minimize impacts at Exit 2. The major premise for this alternative is to not directly impact Porcupine Brook as it meanders through the median area.

**Option 2**

Under this option between Exit 1 and Exit 2, the railroad would be located in the existing I-93 median and the widened I-93 NB barrel would be located where the existing NB barrel currently is, with the widening to the east side to avoid impacts to Porcupine Brook. The rail alignment swings somewhat wider around the southbound ramps at Exit 1 to accommodate proper geometry for light rail. Between Exit 1 and Exit 2, the rail corridor would be adjacent to the NB barrel, possibly supported on a trestle system to minimize impacts to Porcupine Brook.

**Option 3**

This option keeps the rail corridor to the west of I-93 SB to a point north of Exit 2 where the existing NB and SB barrels diverge, allowing the rail to come back into the median. Due to the rail design speed that is trying to be maintained through this area, the skew angle between the highway and rail corridors, and existing resources in the area, this is the first opportunity to bring the rail back into the median. A reasonable skew angle for the rail crossing would still result in large right of way impacts. Further constraints to this option include property impacts, complications in getting by Exit 2, and lack of rail station opportunities.

Tony mentioned that Option 2 seems to be the best alternative at this time, resulting in less impacts to resources and utilizing as much of the existing pavement as possible for the highway system.

The following is a summary of the discussion that followed:

- Mark Kern asked about the safety of having a light rail next to the highway. Tony explained that in areas where the rail was adjacent to one of the barrels, there would be a barrier between them.
- Rich Roach asked what the project purpose is and what was going to be studied as far as alternatives and impacts. Jeff stated that the project purpose was to fix the I-93 corridor relative to safety and capacity. The Department is developing designs incorporating rail in an effort to not preclude the possibility of rail in the I-93 corridor in the future. The Department recognizes that rail may well be a viable means of transportation in the future, and is proposing to develop improvements to I-93 with that in mind. However rail alternatives per se are not the focus of this project. Jeff also noted that the State constitutional law complicates efforts to fund transit projects. The law currently requires spending gas tax revenues on highway construction and maintenance only.
- Rich asked if the Department would propose a three-lane alternative with a rail corridor in lieu of a four-lane alternative. Jeff explained that the Department is in the process of

confirming ridership volumes. Estimates of ridership have been low based on the Statewide Transportation Corridor Model and need to be confirmed. It would appear that transit options would not remove enough vehicles to allow for the highway widening to involve only three lanes. Current projections indicate that four lanes in each direction are required between the state line and Exit 3 at a minimum.

- Mark Kern asked if there was a way that the current gas tax laws could be changed. Jeff stated that such a change would require a constitutional amendment, a difficult hurdle to overcome.
- Rich questioned whether providing eight lanes would make for less incentive for people to use the transit option. If you give people three lanes to drive in and the traffic remains heavy, then they will use the train. With that said, if the purpose of the project is to widen the highway to some reasonable capacity, the Corps can accept that.
- Harry Kinter asked if the study will show impacts to resources where the rail swings way outside the right of way. Jeff explained that the specific impacts due to rail are not proposed to be studied until the rail is built. The Department is not proposing to build the rail as part of this project. That is for another study. Jeff said that the Department would look at acquiring the right of way for the rail where it makes sense as part of this project. He noted that it would be hard to tell someone with property well outside the I-93 right of way that you are acquiring his or her land for a rail corridor that might not ever get built.
- Rich asked who the Department would go to for funding if it is decided to build the rail. Jeff mentioned that they are currently in the process of reviving the train service from Nashua to Lowell, and that it might be extended in the future to Merrimack and even Manchester. As far as who would pay for it, he is not sure. It is a funding issue that involves a number of agencies and sponsors.
- Mark Kern asked that there be presentation when the ridership numbers are available. Lori Sommer also felt such a meeting would be important.
- Rich suggested getting the Federal Transit Authority (FTA), the Corps, Resource Agencies, and the public involved developing some discussion around these issues. He felt that perhaps the Department should formally request the FTA be a Cooperating Agency. Jeff responded by saying that the Department is coordinating with all these groups as the project progresses. Relative to rail, meetings are anticipated with Massachusetts's officials, MBTA officials and FTA officials. He reiterated the fact that the Department does not foresee building the rail as part of widening I-93, and that it is possible that a rail will not be built in the corridor. He mentioned that the focus needs to remain on the highway. Rich responded by saying that his rationale was that the FTA's expertise is needed. Jeff stated that given the level of design required and the focus of the project (to address I-93) FTA's formal involvement should not be required. Jeff also encouraged the Corps and other Resource Agencies to attend the Public Meetings the Department will be holding during the preliminary design phase. Lori Sommer requested that meeting notes be forwarded to the resource agencies.
- Mark Kern reiterated Rich's concern regarding whether or not a train would be appealing if four lane sections were built.
- Rich asked if Federal Highway was going to pay to build the rail. Bill O'Donnell stated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) does not fund the construction of railroads.
- Mark Kern stated that he thought it appropriate that the Department was looking to not preclude the use of rail within the corridor.

Jeff explained that the Final Scoping Report would be coming out in the next couple of weeks. He also mentioned that there would be ATF meetings this summer and Public Informational meetings late this fall.